

referencing, in the electronic contract, one or more terms for electronic distribution of the media content;

comparing the candidate retail offer to the one or more distribution terms; and

validating the candidate retail offer when the candidate retail offer is consistent with the one or more distribution terms.

Claim 3 (Cancelled)

4. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, wherein the allocating step further comprises allocating to the retailer a predetermined portion of the compensation according to one or more financial terms in the electronic contract.

5. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, wherein the allocating step further comprises allocating to the distributor a predetermined portion of the compensation according to one or more financial terms in the electronic contract.

Claims 6-13 (Cancelled)

14. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, wherein the one or more distribution terms comprise contractual terms of agreement for distribution of the electronic media content by the retailer.

15. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, wherein the one or more distribution terms comprise contractual terms of agreement for distribution of one or more of a group of electronic media contents by the retailer.

Claim 16 (Canceled)

17. (Previously Presented) A method for validating an offer for the distribution of electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, comprising the steps of:

- a. receiving one or more electronic distribution contracts, between the distributor and the retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;
- b. receiving a candidate offer from the retailer;
- c. checking the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts upon receiving the candidate offer, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and
- d. sending an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

Claim 18 (Canceled)

Claim 19 (Cancelled)

Claim 20 (Canceled)

a memory in operative connection with the processor for storing processing instructions enabling the processor to:

receive one or more electronic distribution contracts, between a distributor and a retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;

receive a candidate offer from the retailer;

check the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and

send an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

24. (Previously presented) An apparatus for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of an electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, comprising:

a processor; and

a memory in operative connection with the processor for storing processing instructions enabling the processor to:

receive one or more electronic financial contracts, between a distributor and the retailer, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction;

distribute the electronic media content to the consumer;

receive payment information from the consumer indicating at least the receipt of compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

reference the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

25. (Previously presented) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for distributing electronic media content over a network, the method comprising:

providing an electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content by accessing the electronic contract upon receipt of the candidate retail offer if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, providing the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the amount of compensation for the electronic media content provided; and

allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

26. (Previously presented) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for validating an offer for the distribution of electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, the method comprising:

receiving one or more electronic distribution contracts, between the distributor and the retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;

receiving a candidate offer from the retailer;

checking the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and

sending an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

27. (Previously presented) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of an electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, the method comprising:

receiving one or more electronic financial contracts, between a distributor and the retailer, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction;

distributing the electronic media content from a central location to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

28. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, further comprising:

providing the electronic contract at a central location;

receiving the request from the consumer at the central location; and

receiving the payment information at the central location.

29. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, further comprising:

dynamically updating the electronic contract; and

applying the electronic contract to the distribution of the electronic media content only after receiving the request from the consumer.

30. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, further comprising:

dynamically updating the distribution terms; and

referencing the one or more distribution terms only after receiving the request from the consumer.

31. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 17, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

32. (Previously presented) The method of claim 17, further comprising:

receiving the electronic distribution contracts at a central location; and

receiving the candidate offer at the central location.

33. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 17, further comprising:
dynamically updating the one or more electronic distribution contracts; and
referencing the terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts only after receiving
a request from a consumer.

34. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~19~~ 21, further comprising:
receiving the electronic financial contracts at a central location; and
distributing the electronic media content from the central location.

35. (Currently Amended) The method as in claim ~~19~~ 21, further comprising:
dynamically updating the one or more electronic financial contracts; and
referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts only after receiving a request from
a consumer.

36. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as in claim ~~22~~ 23, wherein the processor is
further enabled to:
provide the electronic contract at a central location;
receive the request from the consumer at the central location; and
receive the payment information at the central location.

37. (Previously presented) The apparatus as in claim 23, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

38. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 25, further comprising:
providing the electronic contract at a central location;
receiving the request from the consumer at the central location; and
receiving the payment information at the central location.

39. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 26, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

40. (Previously presented) A method for distributing physical media content, comprising the steps of:

providing an electronic contract for distributing the media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the physical media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the physical media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the physical media content, upon receipt of the request, if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, distributing the physical media content to the consumer;

48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 47, further comprising the steps of:
upon successful transaction, compensating the second value chain participant according to
the electronic contract.

49. (Cancelled)

50. (Cancelled)

51. (Cancelled)

52. (Cancelled)

53. (Cancelled)

54. (Cancelled)

55. (Previously presented) A method for distributing electronic media content over a
network, comprising the steps of:

identifying an electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content
between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a
consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

receiving, from a consumer, a request to accept a candidate retail offer for access to
the electronic media content;

accessing the electronic contract upon receipt of the request;

comparing the candidate retail offer to the electronic contract;

validating the candidate retail offer if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, allowing the consumer to access the electronic media content;

receiving, from the consumer, at least compensation for the access to the electronic media content; and

determining the allocation of the compensation according to the electronic contract.

56. (Previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein the identifying, accessing, comparing and validating steps are performed by a reference server.

57. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of packing general contract terms with the electronic media content.